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*England. — Churches and Religious Bodies. —
Baptists. — Western Association.*

T H E
ELDERS and MESSENGERS
OF THE SEVERAL
BAPTIST CHURCHES
MEETING AT

*Cheltenham, Kingstanley, Grittleton and Malmesbury,
Melksham, Trowbridge, Calne, Broad-mead and
Pithay Bristol, Horshy, Frome, Crofcomb, Yeovil,
Lyme, Wellington, Prescott, Tiverton and Sod-
bury;—having received letters also from
Sarum, Bratton, Bradford, Crockerton, Horsing-
ton, Bicknell, Chard, Loughwood, Upottery, Stoke-
gomer, Kingsbridge and Cullumpton; being met
in affociation, at Sodbury, on the 9th and 10th
days of June, 1772, to the churches they
represent, send Christian salutation.*

BELOVED BRETHREN,

THROUGH the goodness of our indulgent God,
we have had another annual meeting, which,
we trust, has been rendered pleasant and profitable
unto us, by the gracious presence of our exalted
Emmanuel. We have read your letters with a mix-
ture

ture of pleasure and pain, and spread them before the Lord with alternate thanksgiving and prayer. We are glad to hear that *all* the churches continue stedfast in their belief and esteem of the essential truths of the gospel, whilst various attempts are repeatedly made to undermine their impregnable foundation; that they are in general at peace among themselves; and that to several of them there have been considerable additions. We likewise rejoice with you that our civil and religious liberties are continued unto us. May these inestimable privileges be suitably improved and uninterruptedly enjoyed! Happy were it for us, happy were it for you, beloved brethren, had we no unwelcome news to impart, no distressing complaint to make, no just and necessary reproof to administer: but our hearts must be very insensible indeed, not to feel a painful concern for the sins and miseries of a perishing world, and for the declensions and distresses of a lukewarm church. Yes, we are grieved at heart to behold our native land deluged with a flood of the most daring impieties, and overspread with a cloud of the most destructive errors. O Lord God! let the arm of thy power stem the rapid tide of prophaneness, and the beams of thy grace dispel the pestilential vapours of infidelity.

But it is the repeated complaints we have received of sad defects in the spirit and practice of religion in many of you, beloved brethren, that now particularly claims our attention, excites our grief, and calls for our faithful admonition. Such is the special and fervent love we bear you as the disciples of the adorable Jesus, such is the earnest concern we feel for your temporal and eternal welfare, such is the sacred relation subsisting between you and us in the endearing bonds of the gospel, and such are the indispensable duties we owe you as the precious objects of our most solemn charge, that we would now earnestly address you, as we have done in years past, upon the most interesting subjects, and in the most affectionate manner.

manner. And O that what we have now to offer to your consideration, as in the name and presence of the great Head of the church, may not be carelessly read or heard by any of you as a matter of form, but seriously regarded and properly improved!

Your circumstances in the civil and religious life, perhaps, are widely different: we sympathize with you who are pining under tedious afflictions, overwhelmed with perplexing cares, or sorely distressed with pressing indigence: may you still have faith in God, have peace in Christ, and be enabled to suppress every repining every envious thought. Your Lord himself was once a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: the children of God in every age have been a poor and afflicted people; this world is neither your portion nor your rest, and all your present afflictions are but momentary, and work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. May you who are blest with affluence and ease, remember that you are but *stewards* of the numerous talents entrusted in your hands; may you be peculiarly thankful to the distinguishing goodness of God; may you feel and manifest a tender compassion for your indigent brethren; and may you give noble proofs, by your chearful and liberal contributions upon all proper religious occasions, that you count all your gold but dross, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus your Lord, and that your chief affections are on things above.

But it is your circumstances in the *religious* life that we principally regard. It is with animating pleasure that we behold some of you, dear brethren, healthy in your souls, strong in the faith, lively in your frames, growing in grace, rich towards God, and ripening for glory. Go on, and prosper yet more and more; and may the peace and presence of your Redeemer ever attend you. But alas! What discouragement and grief of heart do we feel, when we behold those of you who are of a very different complexion, who are sickly and feeble in the
spiritual

spiritual life, who move on heavily in the paths of obedience, whose conversation is earthly, trifling and unprofitable, and whose daily pursuit seems to center much more in the perishing objects of time, than in the joys and glories of an eternal world! You once professed universal detestation of sin, a fervent love to God, supream delight in the ways of religion, and a holy indifference to the objects of sense: but now you are become almost strangers to closet devotion, deep contrition for sin, earnest wrestling with the Lord in prayer, heavenly affections, and sensible communion with God: the more spiritual duties of Christianity are either totally laid aside, or discharged in a lukewarm and formal manner: the precious truths and promises of the gospel have lost their wonted favour; and a vain proud selfish and earthly temper of mind too evidently prevails. And are you now in your native element, Sirs! Can you still live, can you chearfully die, can you enter heaven, think you, in such a wretched frame as this! Or will you call *this* the religion of Jesus! Is *this* the fruit of his love and crucifixion! And is *this* glorifying God, and manifesting your thankfulness for his great salvation? You know it is not, and that without holiness of heart and a heavenly disposition of soul, it is impossible to please God here, or behold him with comfort hereafter. Our orthodox notions, and warmest zeal to promote them, our stated attendances on public means and ordinances, our outward shew of godliness in the sight of men, and our transient legal convictions and former imaginary comforts, will avail us nothing without a living faith in Jesus Christ, a faith that worketh by love, that purifieth the heart, and overcometh this evil world. Religion consisteth not in a just conception of its divine truths in the head, without an implantation of its divine nature in the heart. May you, brethren, have such a spiritual sight of the awful perfections of God, of the adorable glories of Christ, and of the ineffable excellency of divine and eternal things, as
may

may deaden your affections to sensual enjoyments, and transform you into the image of your blessed Redeemer ! We beseech you, carefully watch against all temptations to sin and occasions of remissness in duty, and diligently attend on the means of instruction and comfort. Be much with God in spiritual meditation and secret prayer ; read the holy scriptures with the greatest reverence and attention ; guard against prejudice, and a vain curious and trifling disposition of mind in your attendance on the ministry of the word, which perhaps, is one of the chief causes of our spiritual leanness ; seek to be *profited* as well as pleased ; never rest in duties and ordinances, but constantly rest in Christ alone, and look for every blessing you need, in and thro' him the infinitely prevalent Mediator. Live daily on Christ as your spiritual food, and seek hourly communion with him as the beloved of your souls : let it appear to all around you, by your heavenly temper and amiable conversation, that you are indeed the sincere disciples and the intimate friends of Jesus : convince the world of the reality and excellence of vital godliness, and of the power and sweetness of the blessed gospel ; and let your holy deportment, in every state and connection, be a convincing proof that the doctrines of grace are far from being licentious. O brethren ! What shall we say to you more ? Would you lift up the drooping hands of your poor ministers ?—Would you animate one another in your Christian warfare ?—Would you reflect honour upon the name, the truths, and the ordinances of Jesus ?—Would you answer the glorious end of God in your salvation ?—And would you anticipate on earth the joys and blessedness of heaven ? O be much in the exercise of every spiritual grace. Be much in the performance of every Christian duty. Your time to labour in the vineyard is but short, eternity, eternity is at hand ! And yet you have much to do for God, and your obligations to serve him are unspeakably great ; nor will your work of faith and labour
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of love be in vain in the Lord, for great is your reward in heaven. We have often addressed you in this annual manner, but probably some of us, and several of you may make our solemn appearance in an eternal world before another meeting of this nature. God grant we may be all faithful unto death, and at length receive the unfading crown of eternal life!

We would earnestly recommend it to you all, dear brethren, narrowly to inspect your heart and conduct,—regularly to keep up family religion in your houses,—to watch over one another in meekness and love,—to be careful you do not take any offence from, neither give offence unto one another,—to assist your ministers in supporting a gospel discipline among yourselves,—to be on your guard against strangers that may lie in wait to deceive you,—to encourage meetings of prayer and conference,—to live in love, as much as may be, with your Christian brethren of other denominations,—to do good unto all men, so far as it may lie in your power,—to influence all you can to attend the means of grace,—to promote the interest of genuine religion,—and, in fine, to glorify God with your souls, bodies, and substance,—to whose blessed and constant protection we commend you, and remain your affectionate brethren in our adorable Emmanuel.

Signed on behalf of the whole assembly by the Moderator.

ROBERT DAY.

MINUTES

MINUTES of the ASSOCIATION.

Tuesday afternoon the meeting was opened in prayer by our brother *Rawlings*, the letters from the churches were then read, the Moderator chosen, the several affairs laid before us attentively considered, and the meeting closed in prayer by our brother *Wood*.

Early on Wednesday morning time was improved in prayer by our brethren, *Pine, Kent, Wills* and *Sotteridge*, after which the general letter drawn up by our brother *Francis*, was read approved and signed, and the meeting closed in prayer by our brother *Newton*.

The public meeting was opened at ten o'clock by singing, and time spent in prayer by our brother *C. Evans*; brother *Francis* succeeded in prayer, brother *Day* then preached from *Acts xi. 20, 21.* *And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.* The meeting was then closed in singing and some time improved in prayer by our brother *Tommas*.

At half past two in the afternoon, the meeting was again opened by singing, and time spent in prayer by our brother *Kingdon*, our brother *Sprague* then preached from *Rom. viii. 32.* *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* And the public meeting was then concluded with singing, and time spent in prayer by our brother *H. Evans*.

Agreed, to recommend days of fasting and prayer as usual.

Agreed,

Agreed, to recommend the case of the people at *Horshly*, who on account of a dwelling-house for their minister, enlarging their meeting-house at *Horshly*, building a large vestry there, and erecting a commodious place of public worship at *Hampton*, appear to be in debt 134 *l.* as well worthy encouragement.

Agreed, to hold the next association at *Broadmead, Bristol*, Tuesday afternoon and Wednesday in the *Whitsun* week. Our brethren Messrs. *Francis*, of *Horshly*, and *Gibbs*, of *Plymouth*, to preach the sermons.

In the associated churches the last year, there were

Baptized	—	110
Received from other churches, &c.	—	10
		120
Dead	—	60
Dismissed to other churches	—	2
Excluded	—	6
		68
Increase	—	52

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